have nothing we can call our own." "It is the very definition of slavery."[33] Even more alarming than the spate of recent British laws was the principle of parliamentary sovereignty over America that lay behind them. To Iredell such thinking, as enunciated in Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries*, was "narrow and pedantic." If it had merit earlier when all Englishmen lived at home and when all the "forms" of government were "simple ones," the concept no longer held true. The empire, correctly examined, was a federation of "several *distinct* and independent legislatures, each engaged within a *separate* scale, and employed about *different* objects," all united by a common monarch.

Iredell contended, as had Jefferson that same year in his *Summary View* pamphlet, that Parliament had no jurisdiction over the colonies because they were originally the possession of the king, who was the lone source of British authority outside the realm. Not until the Puritan period did the English legislature interfere in colonial affairs, an intrusion that had continued ever since. The real tie between the colonies and the mother country was the same as the one that had existed between England and Scotland before the Act of Union in 1707: when each country, having its own legislature, was linked to the other through their joint king.

What was the validity of Iredell's interpretation of the British constitution—a forerunner of the modern commonwealth idea—in terms of seventeenth and eighteenth century political and legal developments? There is, of course, no definitive answer, especially since the seventeenth century was a period of disorganization and crisis so far as the constitution was concerned. More significant is the fact that Iredell demonstrated a considerable knowledge of English law and history, which he exercised with skill and persuasion.

Finally, Iredell, a young man not yet turned twenty-three, displayed a full measure of practicality and common sense. He acknowledged that clever Englishmen might punch holes in the fabric of his constitutional view of the empire. If so, he warned, then "the original rights of mankind should correct and alter them." The colonists "would not be cheated out of" their "liberties by a few artful syllables" or by "some clerical defect." Regardless of finely spun theories of indivisible sovereignty, free government depended on the "general confidence of the people." Still, Iredell was trying to hold an old empire together, not create a new nation.

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[33] "To the Inhabitants of Great Britain," September, 1774, below.